

Literature

The Undeniable Genius of John Williams: *Stoner* and the Man Who Wrote the Perfect Novel

William Stoner entered the University of Missouri as a freshman in the year 1910, at the age of nineteen. Eight years later, during the height of World War I, he received his doctor of Philosophy degree and accepted an instructorship at the same university, where he taught until his death in 1956. He did not rise above the rank of assistant professor, and few students remembered him with any sharpness after they had taken his courses.

So begins former University of Denver English professor John Williams' quiet masterpiece, *Stoner*, the story of an unremarkable scholar and his unremarkable life. The novel was published in 1965 and was out of print by 1967.

Williams, who authored three other books, enjoyed neither commercial nor critical success before his death in 1994. But thanks to a French author who recognized Williams' exquisite prose, the book was reissued in 2006 in Europe and soon hit the bestseller list, followed by acclaim in the U.S.

Critic Morris Dickstein called *Stoner* "a perfect novel ... [that] takes your breath away." A Williams' colleague said in the recent biography, "How could such a son of a bitch have such talent?" Revered or reviled, Williams' gift as a novelist was undeniable.

This celebration, on the 55th anniversary of *Stoner*'s publication, honors the novelist and his masterpiece with a half-day of virtual sessions via Zoom.

Half-day Zoom conference

Sat., Oct. 24, 2020, 9 am–12 pm MT

ENRICH 0412 / \$75



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SPEAKERS AND THEIR TOPICS

W. Scott Howard, Ph.D., editor of *Denver Quarterly* - *John Williams and the Denver Quarterly*. Howard discusses Williams' work on the *Denver Quarterly*, DU's literary magazine, including the early days, his contribution, his vision and if we can see any of his influences in it today.

Anne Marie Candido - *Williams' Archives: The Final Legacy*. Candido, who organized Williams' special collection at the University of Arkansas and worked with him for months, shares her reflections on his greatest novel and what she found most revealing about him.

Alan Prendergast, Keynote - *John Williams: Artist of the Plain*. Prendergast, an investigative journalist, offers a critical look at the austere and subversive storytelling of *Stoner*.

Conference coordinators Sally Stich (DU '72) and Sally Kurtzman have coordinated many writing conferences, and each taught literature and writing at the college level for 30 years.